

Prisoner-Swap Idea Credited to Donovan

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It was James B. Donovan, not Fidel Castro who suggested that Francisco (The Hook) Molina del Rio and the three Cuban saboteurs be released in return for the freeing of the remaining Americans in Cuban jails.

This was reported yesterday by a reliable source. Justice Department sources had said previously that Premier Castro had expressed an interest in the four men being held in New York State and that the swap had resulted.

According to the version obtained yesterday, this is what happened.

Donovan, the New York lawyer who first negotiated the release last December of 1113 Cubans captured at the Bay of Pigs, was back in Havana again last January. In discussing with Castro the possibility of getting some 20-odd Americans out of Cuban prisons, Donovan suggested that amnesty might be obtained for Molina and the three indicted saboteurs—Roberto Santa-Fe, Esteban Casanova, Marino Antonio Esteban del Carmen Saeiro y Cab-

This amnesty would, of course, be conditional on Castro's granting amnesty to the Americans. Castro was interested, particularly in the freeing of Molina. Molina was serving a 20-year-to-life sentence as the slayer of a 9-year-old Venezuelan girl in a New York barroom political brawl during Castro's visit to the United Nations in 1960.

In Cuba, Donovan discovered, there was more feeling about Molina's plight than about that of the saboteurs. He was regarded as a political prisoner, and Castro was eager to have him released.

Donovan proposed the exchange to Castro, who was interested. On his return to Washington, Donovan sounded out Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, who agreed to go along with the plan.